Benefits of embedding research in a public hospital setting

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The WHO translation goal states that policy and practice should be informed by evidence generated by research. However, evidence often fails to inform policy and practice, and research often does not respond to policy needs. In Kenya, the distinction between people in healthcare and those in research became even clearer when during the COVID-19 pandemic, myths about the vaccines rolled out on Emergency use approval led to initial resistance of the same. This opened our eyes to the need for more integration of research and healthcare systems.

Victoria Biomedical Research Institute (VIBRI) was created with a model that works within the public health system rather than working independently as a clinical research organization. This was achieved by integrating the human resource functions and the infrastructure of both VIBRI and Kisumu County Referral Hospital which is a busy Public Hospital. The system works in a mutually beneficial way that allows the research institution to make use of the public hospital facilities like the laboratory equipment and the conference facilities while the hospital benefits from improved quality of services, maintenance of the hospital equipment like the back-up generators required for both pharmacy and laboratory cold chain management, support in supply management and clinical research training opportunities for the hospital staff. Integration of the human resource function also worked to enlighten the healthcare workers on how clinical trials are conducted and how investigational products get to the point of authorization. This built the confidence of healthcare workers in research and by extension the community they serve. Working in the public hospital set up also leads to creating solutions that are customized directly to the problems faced within the healthcare setting. This is because data collected at the hospital provides insights on what the health problems are and could be used to design future studies that provide possible relevant solutions that will in turn inform health policy. In conclusion, an important lesson learnt from the VIBRI collaboration with the public hospital is that there are cost efficiencies, potential synergies and identification of research priority areas when private and public institutions partner in clinical research.